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Iboga

Back to the Source and heading for freedom in 40 hours:
Quit smoking without withdrawal symptoms

A few months ago I decided to stop smoking. Whilst exploring this initiative, I met my friend and co-supervisor Erik Spaans, who had a similar plan. We discussed our plans and their variations. "Well, it's easier said than done" we joked, while holding a cigarette in our hands.

We both knew that the demon hiding beneath the nicotine addiction would stir when its feeding time did not materialise, and that this would be accompanied by all the disaster scenarios of broken friendships and divorces. A half year early, I had decided to stop smoking using sheer will power. Two weeks later my wife Tanja said in an authoritative tone, addressing my grumpy face: "For God's sake, start smoking again!"

The message was clear. I had to find the source of this problem. How did I relapse into smoking again? Oh yes, right after a Buddhist meditation in Amsterdam, subsequently I sat in the train for one and a half hours considering myself to be an enlightened master, repeating the words of Sogyal Rinpoche playfully in my mind. "So there was no more to it than this, so very easy ... so this is enlightenment", I pondered. The tram stopped at the "Grote Markt" and there I decided to walk the rest of the way to my destination. On the way I heard familiar house music coming from the Silly Symphonic club. I went in and met all my friends from the old drug-circle days, sat behind the turntables DJ-ing ... went to the bar for a small Bacardi coke (downplaying addictions really isn't helpful!) and accepted a cigarette from someone.

I had been "unenlightened", from sensei to wrang-wrang (= he who teaches others by showing non-exemplary behaviour, in order for them to discover the good in themselves) in barely five minutes. I did not intend to continue smoking, but the spirit was willing, and the demon of addiction as well. My body moaned and complained, but it had, had too much to digest. So be it, it wailed, and kept me from feeling that miserable back pain. And this was how the pact came to be, the pact of the Black Dragon. This dragon - stirring itself whenever important spiritual manifestations are about to happen in a human lifetime - would go to any length in order to keep me addicted.

Erik and I decided to devise a thorough strategy, one that would be able to withstand "heavy storms" when it really mattered. Our plans seemed to be sound. By gradually decreasing addiction related habits, it seemed the dragon would be (stilled) kept silent. My body responded well and was feeling the differences in my general energy level. Up until then, my feet had been cold for three years, but after renouncing coffee they spontaneously became warm. Signals of this kind and other small omens became indications of the success of our strategy; the path of love, instead of sole will-power.

For the final stage of the quitting-process we deployed of the biggest "gunboat" we could find: Tabernanthe Iboga, until recently, this African name alone made me shiver; let alone the idea of me taking it. An inner-journey of 24 to 36 hours - 10 times as long compared to my average experience with other entheogenic substances. However: Iboga is renowned for suppressing heroin addiction, without any "Cold Turkey" withdrawal symptoms. We found our Black Dragons too intimidating to confront without any form of assistance: Iboga had to be it. Almost like a child asking the playground bully for help against another bully! Intuition decided it: IBOGA. Erik would go through this Sacred Voyage on a micro dose, I was going Full Monty.

After some study and orientation, we learnt one of the Creation stories of Iboga. It's an account of how the Pygmies have been threatened for centuries by a people living close to their homeland, the much bigger Bwiti. The Pygmies could never openly confront them, so they conjured up the scheme of giving their most appreciated magic to the Bwiti: Iboga. The Pygmies knew that once their enemy had devoured the root, their hearts would open, thus ensuring the safety of the Pygmy people. And so it

came to be that the Bwiti became the protectors of the Pygmy tribe. This story opened up my eyes and once more I found my mind being easily lured into believing negative stories or preparation for the worst; this Medicine has a whole new meaning. It's not a demon killing dragons. It's pure Love. At least if we take this story of creation serious. We'll see!

We started the Iboga ceremony by building our sweat-lodge, collecting wood and starting the fire; pleasant manual labour. As a part of the ceremony and in order to counter the first layers of emotion, I did holotropic breath-work. We burned our last cigarette in the roaring fire as kind of a ritual gesture; the fire being as insatiable as our nicotine addiction. Ceasing the nurturing is the only way to extinguish the fire. It was ironic; there we were without any tobacco, knowing that our bodies were bracing themselves for the maddening and persisting hunger for nicotine. We would come to a surprising twist in the tale.

We took a symbolical foretaste of the Iboga, the taste spread like fire. And pronto: No more withdrawal symptoms! Instantaneously! The taste and working of Iboga is so powerful it neutralises the nicotine completely. Someone once told me this effect is similar to Neo taking the blue pill in the Matrix. His head changed to metal in an instant. To now experience it first hand was just as amazing.

Subsequently we went into the sweat-lodge four times and gradually we became comfortable with our companion, Iboga. A wonderful ally in hard times!

After the beautiful cleansing in the sweat lodge I immediately took a large dose of Iboga, a fine powder containing some wood, twigs and sand-grains. Twenty minutes of chewing was required. The first few mouthfuls that were taken every other hour were quite doable, but thereafter... The taste was horridly bitter; about as bitter as chewing a pack of cigarettes - how appropriate! However, we focused on our intention, with the aid and mastery of this master sorcerer plant, and that made all of it bearable, endless peace and quiet. My body felt heavy and so I quickly lay in my hammock. Wonderful! No monsters anywhere to be recognised, no emotions, demons or pain, just Love. Dance valley 2003 within! And more love kept on coming: love in abundance, coming in shiploads. And humour...

At one moment I was tested. A voice asked teasingly: 'When you get to the Source shortly, you get to ask ONE question. What will you ask?' In a phony accent I replied: "So what's up doc"?

The Jester asking me the question made fun of me and said she would grant me any wish I had, everything I could ever dream of, and of all things I could ask, I asked, "So what's your name by the way"? "The Source" would answer "The Source" that much was clear according to the words of the Jester. It kept on nagging for a while telling me about the grand things other mystics had experienced here, but when it realised it couldn't move me from my place, it relaxed. I started to develop more confidence in the spirit of Iboga, it was fantastic, absolutely no fear, pain, no discomfort at all, nothing but unadulterated Love. I could feel my body giving in to the low frequency vibrations, digestion stopped, and my heart slowed down. My body became cold and all bodily energy became focussed at the point of my Third Eye.

I had barely been able to drag myself into my bed when the inner fireworks exploded. I was connected to the Source, all my cells were "treated" at an amazing rate, comparable to Ayahuasca, but in a less subtle way. It felt as if my entire body has been taken over by a very competent doctor/psychiatrist/shaman/computer mechanic, the latter shutting down all superfluous bodily functions. 'How did you know?' I try to joke, but my joke was guzzled by the hissing of a pressure cooker. It is as if I found myself in the primordial soup of life, that's exactly how I felt. My inner child was safe and protected by Iboga. My inner critic and my complete ego had been sedated. There's no pain, no darkness, just the scourging Love channelled from the Source by Iboga. 'Ready?' I heard. I nodded, ready for what? GO!

There's no retelling what happened after 'GO'. My best effort would be the three-liner by Terence McKenna: 'Load Universe into cannon. Aim at brain. Fire!'

Except: no bad trip. I was motionless, while my entire mind was amputated from the rest of my being and cleansed at a "Wall Street speed" from a time when the economy was still on its high roll. Meanwhile Iboga was surprising my inner Child. I saw a little puppet and the guess is it was mine, Wilma, the Flintstone. Wrong, try once more! Ah, Lucy Ball. Suddenly I saw the 45 rpm single I found as a child in the trash and played until it was "mute". Enjoy things you find on your way, that's the message behind the scene. Do not ponder on things you would like, but accept whatever presents itself to you in your life. Then the cover of the book, "Charlie and the chocolate factory" appeared; such a great novel for kids. I focused on the Oompa Loompas and all of a sudden singing Pygmies appeared! Wow!!! My intense love for Iboga and the crazed Pygmy spirits increased ever more: my body groaned, moaned, suffers and was being reset: I was in the cooking pot of Mother Earth. At least, my body was. My head was located in the playroom of Love, being mindful and enjoying.

Then all kinds of signals indicated the coming of a needed healing. For a little while the supply of love is reduced, but a couple of deep breaths brought us back to the old level of pure Ecstasy. Just like regaining your breath on a skyscraper, away from the crowds and pace of the city, while deep down below the traffic keeps on roaring.

From there I went from one healing to another. Every instance Iboga found something and displayed it is as a thought or a vaguely recognisable image. I didn't get to think them anymore, only "viewing" was allowed. If I understood I could nod and the messages were removed. It was as if my entire hard-disk was screened by a highly experienced divine and integer nerd, defragmented, provided with antivirus software and updates for my operating system. In a similar fashion the Iboga root guided me through complete movies in high tech colour, sound and emotion. For example, he showed me all my ex-lovers, all the differences and similarities. Then an entire section where I got to stand on a pedestal; where all my exes were watching. I felt all guilt and regrets melting away from my heart, my heart is so very grateful. Then my heart breaks open and I could feel the Source in my heart, unquestionably Divine. The memorandum written down by Erik about the teaching I received at that very moment read:

'How do I make a clear distinction between the revelations of the Divine as opposed to creations of the mind? In a revelation your heart shines brightly. Behind your heart is a secret place that is touched by the presence of the Divine. It becomes - literally - warm or even hot near your heart. Children can be perfectly happy because they feel the divine presence in all and their heart radiates it. Look into a baby's eyes. The same happens on hearing Divine music. Your heart remembers home, the Light. Stretch your spine, open up your chest by hanging your shoulders back, and breathe. Open your heart!'

Writing like this I could go on for nights on end, but for now I feel it's best to stop writing as well as smoking. It's all still brand new and Iboga is still creeping through my cells. We are now 40 hours further, and still I do not experience any withdrawal symptoms. My mood is outstanding. The taste of Iboga is waning; I can taste my teeth again, still affected by nicotine. Before this was a killer, constantly reminding me of smoking and inducing craving, the endless hunger for nicotine. That is nowhere to be found this time - I am so very curious about what tomorrow will bring. 2B continued...;-)

10:00 the next morning

The physical effects of the Iboga have almost passed, and the need for smoking has vanished. Thinking about smoking is still there, but the craving and need has gone with the wind. It's odd, bracing yourself for a blow that will not come. Combined with some healthy scepticism about the permanence of all this, it is pure bliss. I decide to get on the phone and call Tanja whom I expected to get home today with our kids. They went for shelter from their grumpy old dad! I am outside feeling the morning-sun shining on my head. Tanja is audibly surprised to hear my joyful voice. When I tell her I have succeeded in let go of my smoking habit without going through withdrawal symptoms, tears of joy spring to her eyes. My gaze is drawn downward and instantly I find between hundreds of leaves

a four leafed clover - a last wink of Iboga - or so it seems. I can feel the happiness of new life inside me, and that's priceless.

Two days later

Still I have no withdrawal symptoms. I do experience hypoglycaemia, one of the reasons I started smoking again. Nicotine suppressed the symptoms and seemed to aid digestion. This is a new challenge, to get acquainted with this imbalance a sign of dis-ease and choose healthy food from now on. What remains is a feeling of gratitude, for being allowed to enter the nursery of life for an instant, and having been granted the grace of living this life free of addiction.

Update: four months after: still no craving for nicotine...

Lars Faber

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